

# Reflections on international migration and development in sub-Saharan Africa

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## Abstract

*This reflective article sketches the specificity of migratory flows in sub-Saharan Africa, which is essentially intra-regional. While changing dynamically, the distinctive features include increasing female migration, diversification of migration destinations, transformation of labour flows into commercial migration, and emigration of skilled health and other professionals. These migrations take place largely within the context of sub-regional economic unions which are dominated by the economies of a single country, and movements of persons have been directed to a limited number of countries within these unions. Emigration pressure is fuelled by unstable politics, poverty and rapidly growing populations.*

*In general, remittances have been rising steeply and are an important source of income for many poor countries and serve as lifeline to pay for basic services, health care, education of siblings and children and to enhance agricultural production. Yet, millennium development goals and other development agendas are being compromised by the emigration of scarce skilled manpower. A major challenge now facing the region is how to retain, attract back and effectively utilise the rare skills of nationals living abroad for national development. The paper concludes by stressing the need for rich countries to help poor African countries foster local development, reduce poverty and create domestic employment in the spirit of co-responsibility.*

## Introduction

In sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), intra- and inter-country movements continue to be a central feature of life of the people. Much of this movement takes place in diverse political, economic, socio-ethnic and ecological settings but remains essentially *intra-regional* (Adepaju, 2010). Migrants from and within the region include temporary cross-border workers, unskilled and temporary contract workers, traders, undocumented migrants, highly skilled professionals, and refugees. Distinctive forms of

migration characterise the different sub-regions: labour migration from western and central Africa to other locations within the region, as well as the developed northern and oil-rich countries of the Middle East; refugee flows within eastern, and increasingly in western, Africa; labour migration from eastern and southern African countries to South Africa, and cross-border clandestine migration of nomads in West and East Africa. These configurations are however changing dynamically to the extent that no country remains

unaffected by international migration flows with some serving concurrently as countries of origin, or transit, or destination for migrants (Adepoju, 2005). These countries are also concurrently experiencing challenges and opportunities with respect to the emigration of skilled professionals, the diaspora's links with country-of-origin, and migrants' remittances from within and outside the region.

The issues raised in this paper relate specifically to sub-Saharan Africa – the root causes of emigration dynamics, migration configurations within and outside the region, emigration of skilled professionals, the Diaspora and remittances. We then focus on the consequences of these dynamics for the region, ending with some suggestions on how migration's potential win-win can be attained.

The number of international migrants in Africa rose from 9m in 1960 to 16m in 2000; and Africa “had more than double the number of international migrants than Latin America and the Caribbean since 1980, and about one half to one third of the number in Asia”. This represents 14 percent and 9 percent, respectively, of the share of worldwide international migration. Among the sub-regions, Western and Eastern Africa have higher numbers of international migrants in general and increasingly also of female international migrants. Females have increased their share of international migrants between 1960 and 2000, overtaking Asia but still trailing other regions (Zlotnik, 2003).

Unlike in other world regions, these migrations – better described as ‘circulations’ – involving more than 7 million economically active persons and an

unspecified number of undocumented migrants (ILO, 2004), are largely *intra-regional*. These complex configurations are changing dynamically and are reflected in increasing female migration, diversification of migration destinations, transformation of labour flows into commercial migration, and emigration of skilled health and other professionals. These, and trafficking in human beings and the changing map of refugee flows, are the key migratory configurations.

### **The specificity of migration dynamics in Africa**

A region rooted in migrations, voluntary and compelled, intra-regional migration configurations are fostered by shared culture, language and colonial heritage, factors which also blur the distinction between internal and international migration and circulation, and between migration in regular and irregular situations in the region (Adepoju, 1998). The colonial system reinforced the foundation of present day stocks, flows and patterns of migration in the region. The complementary economies of neighbouring countries and cultural affinity facilitated movements across frontiers. Consequently, significant migration across long borders without distinct landmarks was largely undocumented as frontier workers commute daily between home and place of work on adjacent sides of national borders (Adepoju, 1988). The fluidity of this phenomenon has prompted the discussion whether the term ‘circulation’ rather than migration would be more appropriate in the African context.

These migrations take place largely within the context of economic unions.

Regional economic unions are often dominated by the economies of a single country, and movements of persons have been directed to a limited number of countries within these unions. Examples of these are Botswana and South Africa in southern Africa, Gabon in central Africa, Kenya in eastern Africa, Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria in West Africa. In reality, the prosperity of many of these countries was built by migrant labour—cocoa and coffee plantations in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, mines and agriculture in South Africa, forestry and oil in Gabon. Resource-rich but labour-short countries such as Botswana, Gabon, and Côte d'Ivoire rely heavily on immigrant labour. Thus, for instance, 28 percent of the population of Côte d'Ivoire are foreign born and one quarter of the workers in Gabon are foreigners from and outside Africa. An estimated two million immigrants reside in South Africa. (Adepoju, 2000).

In **West Africa**, intra-regional migration is essentially north-south, and the principal countries of emigration include Burkina Faso, Mali, Togo and in the early 1980s, Ghana. Since the beginning of the century, workers from Burkina Faso have been attracted to the plantation and construction industries in Côte d'Ivoire and (during the 1950s and 1960s) to cocoa farms in Ghana. Indeed, by 1975, 17 per cent of Burkinabes were living abroad. Contract workers and clandestine migrants from south-east Nigeria worked in plantations of the then Fernando Po and Spanish Guinea (Zachariah and Condé, 1981). Senegal is a country of both immigration and emigration. About half of its immigrants came from Guinea and Guinea Bissau, including refugees who

had fled their country for political reasons (Adepoju, 1988).

Until the 1960s, Ghana's high per capita income made the country the 'gold coast' for thousands of immigrants from Togo, Nigeria and Burkina Faso. Since then, Côte d'Ivoire has replaced it as the principal country of immigration in the sub-region. Côte d'Ivoire's domestic labour force is small hence the country's first post-independent president, ignoring colonial-era borders, encouraged immigration from Burkina Faso, Mali, Nigeria, Liberia, Senegal and Ghana to do menial jobs in the plantations which the local population despised. Immigrants constituted 17 per cent of the total population in 1965, 22 per cent in 1975, 28 per cent in 1988, and 25 per cent in 1993. By 1995, there were 4 million immigrants out of a population of 14 million. They were given the right to work, vote, marry local people and own property (Touré, 1998). In a dramatic twist, the country was riddled with crisis since 2000 and remains unstable, economically and politically, spurring emigration, refugee flows and internal displacements, and seriously disrupting economic activities, especially the production and export of cocoa and coffee.

By the mid-1970s, Nigeria had become a country of immigration as the oil-led expansion of road and building construction, infrastructure, education and allied sectors attracted workers, both skilled and unskilled, from Ghana, Togo, Benin, Cameroon, Niger and Chad. These workers entered the country through official and unofficial routes and, by 1982, numbered about 2.5 million. Many were expelled in 1983 and 1985. The deteriorating economic

situation in Ghana gave rise to and sustained the exodus of both skilled and unskilled persons, both men and women. Academics and professionals—doctors, architects, teachers, engineers and pharmacists—frustrated by deteriorating research and training facilities, readily responded to the demand for their skills and were absorbed in Nigeria's hospitals, and government parastatals. Ghana and Nigeria have thus experienced 'migration transition' from being receiving to becoming sending countries in recent decades. Today, Ghana is also experiencing some return migration of skilled professionals.

In **eastern Africa**, people migrating between Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania took advantage of a common language, cultural affinity and shared colonial experience, as well as the defunct and recently resuscitated East African Economic Community. Migrants originated from and worked in the rural areas of a unified political and economic space. The sisal, tea and coffee plantations in Tanzania, Kenya's sugar and tea estates, and the cotton plantations in Uganda all employed locals as well as foreign labourers from the hinterlands of Rwanda and Burundi, densely populated and resource-poor. (Both have joined the resuscitated East African community). Ouchou (1995) categorised the countries of the eastern Africa sub-region into three groups with respect to migration dynamics: major emigration countries, namely Eritrea, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia—all in the Horn—as well as Burundi, Rwanda and Mozambique; immigration countries Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi and Zimbabwe; and countries of both emigration and immigration which are Uganda and

Zambia, adding, however, that the net migration status of all these countries changes over time. This is precisely the case of Zimbabwe which became a country of emigration in the wake of political crisis and the collapse of the country's economy, and of Zambia, following the slump in the copper price in the world market. Kenya today is a country divided, with 300 000 people displaced and over 1 000 murdered in the wake of post-election crisis (Ayiemba, 2011).

The major countries of immigration in **central Africa** are mineral-rich Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The plantation and mining sectors in Gabon and Equatorial Guinea and the palm plantations in Cameroon offered employment opportunities to immigrant labourers from the Central African Republic, Congo and Nigeria, as well as traders, domestic and service workers from Senegal, Mali, Benin and Togo. A rich but small country, Gabon relies on contract labour and immigrants from other African countries and from Europe, who constitute about a quarter of the wage earners. In the eighties and earlier, thousands of immigrants have entered Gabon from Burundi, Rwanda, DRC and Congo in search of a better life and greater security. As urban unemployment soared to 20 per cent, a presidential decree was issued in 1991 to safeguard jobs for nationals and 'Gabonise' the labour force, and in September 1994, the government enacted laws requiring foreigners to register and pay residence fees, or leave the country by mid-February 1995. By the deadline, about 55 000 foreign nationals were expelled, while 15 000 had legalised

their residency (*Le Courier*, 1997).

In **southern Africa**, during the apartheid-era, labour migrants were recruited in droves from neighbouring countries, often from particular regions and villages to work in designated mines and farms. Undocumented migrants from Lesotho, Zimbabwe and Mozambique worked as seasonal labourers on the farms of Mpumalanga, Free State and Northern Province (Crush and Tshitereke, 2001). What is new is perhaps the scale and diversity of the origin of present-day immigrants who brought their skills, enterprise and drive, their astute posture, visibility and eagerness to explore prospects in Africa's most buoyant economy. Motivated, adaptable and less scornful of menial jobs, immigrants not only do jobs most locals loath, they also accept lower wages which locals scorn, prompting charges by labour unions that they depress wage levels (Oucho and Crush, 2001).

Changing migratory configurations also imply that RSA is concurrently not only a recipient but a sender, perhaps also a transit country, exporting skilled migrants to Europe, North America and Australia. The thousands who emigrated from the country just before and soon after 1994 were mostly skilled whites, especially doctors and their families, sceptical of the prospects of black majority rule and frightened of rising crime in the country. The main migrant labour configuration was from peripheral countries, designed to meet South Africa's apartheid-era labour requirements (Adepoju, 2003).

In recent years, Botswana has become a major country of immigration. A prosperous, politically stable

country, with a rapid and steady economic growth over the past two decades, it has attracted highly skilled professionals, who are in short supply, from Ghana, Zambia, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Nigeria and Kenya. Most of these people work in the private sector and at the university, taking advantage of the relaxed laws on residence and entry introduced in the early 1990s, now being replaced by the localization policy in favour of indigenes (Campbell, 2003).

### **Root causes and patterns of migration**

In general, the major factors prompting emigration are the huge disparities in earning potential between poor and rich countries. These differences reflect prospects for better employment opportunities, training and skill development, and, of course, higher incomes in more favourable socio-economic environments. In recent times, migration has been fuelled globally by access to information, declining costs of travel, demographic dynamics, labour demand and supply dynamics, and the economic return to labour in high-income countries (UN, 2007; OECD, 2005).

In sub-Saharan Africa, emigration pressure is fuelled by unstable politics, ethno-religious conflicts, poverty and rapidly growing populations. Rapid population and labour force growth have combined with persistent economic decline, huge external debt, retrenchment of public sector workers in response to structural adjustment measures, and environmental deterioration to shape trends and patterns of international migration.

Consequently, migration is not only growing in volume in all major sub-



regions, most countries do not have a single migration configuration but a whole range of types at once. Sustained past high fertility (the demographic momentum) ensures rapid increases in persons of working ages. Growing at about 2.8 per cent per year, the region requires about 7.5 million new jobs merely to stabilise the employment situation. Youth unemployment of 18-50 percent and increasingly among graduates ready to do any work, anywhere and at any wage, creates the pools of potential, destitute and desperate migrants, whose numbers are set to double within 25 years.

Unlike 'Asian tigers', however, SSA countries have failed to take advantage of the demographic dividend of a virile young population for investment, economic growth and employment generation. Sub-Saharan Africa's unemployment rate of 9.8 per cent in 2006 was lower than only that of the Middle East/North Africa region, and it has the highest figure for the working poor. Globally, the number of working poor at the US\$1 level declined between 2001 and 2006 – but in SSA it increased by 14 million while the number of US\$2-a-day workers reached a record high of 26 million in 2006 (ILO, 2007). The situation has since worsened as the on-going global economic and financial crisis bites harder and deeper. It is precisely the decent work deficit that prompts the emigration of youths, seeking desperately for a more secure alternative and a future, to engage in dangerous and uncertain journeys in dare-devil ventures to enter Europe in irregular and undocumented situations (see below).

In most countries, the public sector

– the dominant employer – has not been able to provide viable employment opportunities to meet the demands of the rapidly-growing labour force, thus generating large numbers of unemployed youths. Mismanaged economies and human rights abuses, especially under military regimes across the sub-region, have spurred the exile of both skilled and unskilled persons. Conflicts and environmental degradation further aggravated the pressure for migration from poorer to relatively prosperous regions, within and, increasingly, outside the region. In the Sahel in particular desertification and cyclical famines have triggered waves of environmentally-displaced persons across national frontiers within and outside the sub-region (Adepoju, 1995).

Stressful economic conditions, especially the absence of sustainable livelihood opportunities, the perception of a bleak future, coupled with widening disparities in incomes and living standards between the North and the South, have been compounded by political factors, especially poor governance and human rights abuses, fuelling the emigration of young educated persons

Africa's political and economic crises have triggered migratory flows to new destinations which have no prior historical, political or economic links to the countries of emigration. Moreover, as the various crises have intensified, migratory outflows have increased in both size and effect. Broader international trends – globalisation, regional integration, network formation, political transformation, and the entry of multinational corporations in search of cheap labour, coupled with domestic

political and economic malaise have resulted in many countries that were once immigrant-receiving metamorphosing into migrant-sending countries (Adepoju, 2006b). For more than a decade now, these traditional labour-importing countries and attractive destinations for migrants have experienced endemic political and economic crises, which spur out-migration of their nationals, and of migrants.

### Irregular migration to Europe

The introduction of tougher rules regarding entry and residence of foreigners in Europe for regular migration has, since the mid-1990s, inadvertently pushed irregular African migrants to use complex routes via the Maghreb as a transit region to enter Europe clandestinely. African migrants have increasingly adopted more sophisticated, daring, and evasive methods to enter northern countries, even as border controls are tightened. The Maghreb countries, apart from serving as a source of migrants to the European Union countries (especially Spain, France, the Netherlands and Belgium) and the Gulf states, have also become migrant transit and destination countries (Adepoju, 2006a). Indeed, the increasing migration through, and pressure on, transit countries of the Maghreb by irregular migrants from Africa in the hope of crossing to Europe via the Spanish Canary Islands and the Italian island of Lampedusa, is one of the dramatic migration configurations over the last ten years (GCIM, 2005b). The numbers and, especially, the desperation of these youths is fuelled by distorted information on labour market conditions in EU countries and the increasing professionalism of traffickers, scams

and bogus travel intermediaries with promises of passage to Europe, encouraged by the regularisation of the status of irregular immigrants in Spain, among others.

Many die in rickety boats on the sea, or of dehydration along the desert routes. About 2 000 Africans are believed to drown in the Mediterranean each year while attempting such crossings to Europe. The death of six irregular migrants attempting to scale the wire fence in Ceuta to enter Spain in September 2005 prompted the Spanish government to double the height of this metal barricade and defend it with Spanish Legion soldiers and the Civil Guard. The government also stepped up its anti-immigrant collaboration with Moroccan security forces. Since the mid-1990s, intensified border patrolling at the Straits of Gibraltar has prompted migrants to cross from places further east on the Mediterranean coast, as well as exploring new crossing points from ports in Senegal and Mauritania (Adepoju, 2006). For these young men and women, creating more productive jobs and decent work locally holds the promise to arresting the irregular migration of an increasing number of persons surreptitiously seeking entry to Europe.

### **Demand and supply of unskilled and skilled workers**

Rich countries need immigrants to cope with prevailing economic and demographic imperatives: unskilled, sometimes undocumented, immigrants to do poorly paid, dirty, and dangerous jobs which nationals scorn; and highly skilled professionals – IT specialists, engineers, doctors and nurses – are in short supply. In many poor African countries, the

best and brightest are migrating abroad, sometimes working in menial jobs – a loss of productivity to both sending and receiving countries and indeed the migrants whose skills are underutilized. This situation persists as globalisation, which facilitates movement of capital, information and technology, frowns on labour mobility.

Unskilled migrants are required for some kinds of economic activities and are vital to the thriving local economy. Without unskilled migrant workers to do the unglamorous jobs, which indigenes are increasingly reluctant to take up, some services in rich countries could not function. In virtually all developed regions, undocumented immigrants are exploited and vulnerable, compelled to accept jobs with unpleasant physical demands, low and irregular wages, and long working hours. The irregular situation of migrants can and do mitigate the potential advantages of migration. Most irregular migrants work in the underground economy characterised by unstable jobs and low pay. Pegged to the 3Ds – dirty, demeaning and dangerous jobs – they are vulnerable, exploited, cannot unionise, and unscrupulous employers often refuse to pay, threatening them with deportation if brought to the attention of immigration officials. A growing number of migrants are in vulnerable situations, mainly because of their irregular status or the kind of work they do, and many face discrimination. Most irregular migrants are deskilled, frustrated and have poor access to training opportunities, advancement and job carrier. Many African graduate engineers in EU countries clean train tracks, wash toilets, or drive cabs as a survival strategy to enter

the restrictive labour market. Many spend years to defray the huge cost of their irregular migration, and are unable to remit money home. Being vulnerable, exploitable and subject to uncertainty and insecurity, when they do remit money, they normally opt for informal and risky channel of remittances for fear of apprehension and deportation.

The greying of populations and labour shortages in rich countries may accelerate the demand for labour in many sectors. In SSA, high population growth accentuates the supply of manpower, creating a pool of potential emigrants, with a mix of skills, ready to fill vacancies created by an ageing population in the North. The interplay, by promoting migration between these regions, transcends narrow demographic dynamics. Experience has shown that strict restriction on legal migration leads to illegal movements. Closed borders with zero immigration, and open borders for unrestricted immigration are both unrealistic aims, prompting some EU countries to propose a strategy of conditional opening of borders to admit immigrants who satisfy specified criteria, to cope with prevailing economic and demographic imperatives. What seems obvious is that additional workers are required to make up for the expected shortfall in domestic labour force of rich countries and bolster economic growth (GCIM, 2005). This statistical reality is however clouded by xenophobic public opinion. Partial solutions include training local unskilled and unemployed persons, and attracting women to the labour market. Rich countries nevertheless need immigrants to do poorly paid, dirty, and dan-



gerous jobs which nationals scorn. They also need highly specialised professionals, especially software specialists, engineers, doctors and nurses, all of whom are in short supply.

### **Brain drain**

At independence, African countries invested heavily in education to train nationals to fill the gap created by the departing colonialists, education being regarded as the main vehicle for rapid development. Within a generation, these poor countries were able to produce professionals and recently IT specialists. Others were trained abroad, building on the foundation of science and maths courses, even as these countries were trapped in the immense demographic momentum in a situation of sluggish economic growth and employment generation. However, education expanded faster than the absorptive capacity of these countries' economies. The small private and bloated public sectors absorbed only few graduates, resulting in graduate unemployment. Many students sponsored to do post graduate studies in technology, science and engineering abroad stayed back at the end of their studies. Emigration of highly qualified professionals from Zimbabwe, Zambia, Senegal, Ghana and Uganda to South Africa and outside Africa in the 70s intensified in the 80s to Europe, North America and the oil-rich Middle East; between 1986 and 1990, for example, an estimated 50,000 to 60,000 middle and high-level African managers emigrated as domestic socio-economic and political conditions deteriorated (Adepoju, 2000). Many more are believed to have emigrated in recent years.

The global migration market allows

developed countries to unilaterally and freely select who should be admitted, what skill combination and income profile, when and for how long without recourse to the countries of origin that incurred the human capital investment in the migrants. The battle for brains, or talent hunt, is propelled by the dynamics of knowledge-based economies: the possibilities offered by technology and the globalisation of economic activities – as many industries now operate with an international network of operations, components and talents. In many developed economies, highly qualified labour for knowledge-intensive activities is being recruited from third world and emerging market economy countries (Van Agtmael, 2007).

In the Netherlands, for example, the government's 'inviting policy' in 2004 simplified the admission of highly qualified professionals, required for dynamic knowledge-intensive economy of the twenty-first century, from developing countries using a points system based on personal talents, age, education and work experience (Netherlands Government, 2006). Germany's migration law, which came into effect in 2005, creates opportunities for admitting academics and specialists in the technology sector by offering them permanent residence. Their family members can work without restrictions and are not subject to integration requirements. The basic principle of France's new bill on immigration and integration is to secure a more 'elective' immigration for work, study, and research, with a focus on migrants with specific talents who have the potential to contribute to the economic development of France. Britain's points system, adopted in

March 2006, for admitting students and labour migrants, offers highly-skilled migrants a residence permit for a maximum of five years. It also allows them to change jobs without further verification. The system permits students to look for work for a year in England and two years in Scotland at the end of their studies (Adepoju, 2007). If you visit a health facility, it is quite likely that the doctor will be Kenyan, the nurse Ghanaian, the anaesthetist Zimbabwean, the surgeon South African, the therapist Nigerian!

In the United States, the Department of Health and Human Sciences projected a shortfall of about 270,000 full-time registered nurses by 2010 and 800,000 by 2020 (Clearfield and Batalova, 2007). Already in 2005, 15 per cent of all health care workers were foreign born. Sub-Saharan African immigrants in the USA are dominated by West Africans. Of the 809 152 foreign-born SSA population in the USA captured by official statistics in 2002, 357 360 originated from West Africa. These include 139 493 Nigerians, with South Africans constituting a majority of those from southern Africa, at 70 275 out of 71 883. Most of these immigrants have tertiary education, including students with doctoral degrees (Lucas, 2005).

Highly skilled professionals, including doctors, paramedical personnel, nurses, teachers, engineers, scientists and technologists from Africa, were and continue to be attracted by relatively higher salaries and better living conditions in rich countries. For instance, after the collapse of Nigeria's oil-led economy in the mid-1980s, many Ghanaian professionals who had earlier

worked in Nigeria moved, in a step-wise pattern to South Africa, and then to Europe and North America, and the oil-rich Middle East. Many highly skilled people have emigrated to developed countries in response to the deteriorating domestic socio-economic and political conditions.

According to OECD estimates, of the nearly 4 million foreign-born population of sub-Saharan Africa resident in OECD countries, the USA (929 723), the UK (812 371), France (565 590), Portugal (348 263), Canada (271 095) and Australia (188 928) are the major recipient countries. Others with slightly more than 100 000 sub-Sahara Africans include the Netherlands (116 349) and Belgium (107 716), trailed by Sweden (68 077), Spain (79 263) and Greece (56 859). More than 100 000 (2½ per cent) are professionals (OECD, 2007). This is, ironically, about the same as the number of expatriate professionals employed by aid agencies in sub-Saharan Africa as part of the overall aid package – at a cost to the region of about \$4 billion. This process denies the region the optimum utilisation of the skills of its diaspora and of development goals by the outflow of home-grown scarce skilled manpower (United Nations, 2003). For Nigerians and Zambians in particular, highly skilled professionals constitute about a half or more of expatriates living in OECD countries. Two in every five nationals of Benin, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Cameroon, Lesotho, Malawi and South Africa are highly skilled professionals. The driving force is the wide differential in incomes: a trained nurse in Uganda earns \$ US38 per month and a doctor \$67 per month while their colleagues in

the USA could earn about \$3 000 and \$10 000, respectively. The region thereby pays the price of producing the human capital for use by the rich countries, and is denied the realisation of its development goals.

About 23 000 African university graduates and 50 000 executives leave the sub-Saharan region annually, and about 40 000 of them with Ph D degrees now live outside Africa (Mayer, 2001). It is estimated that people of foreign origin represent 12 per cent of the highly qualified component of the labour force in the USA, and this may well also be true of many European countries. Africans with professional, technical and managerial skills have used the US 'diversity visa' (or Green Card lottery) programme, which was designed to liberalise immigration by creating avenues for large numbers of immigrants from new sources to enter the USA. Between 1990 and 1998, these numbered 52 000 or 7 per cent of the total of professional, technical and managerial immigrants to the USA (Lucas, 2005). Probably about a third of researchers and engineers from poor countries work in (developed) OECD countries, a significant number indeed and a huge human capital flow produced at great cost by poor countries (Adepoju, 2006b).

Specialists in new technologies, engineering, medicine and healthcare are a small proportion of the emigrants from sub-Saharan Africa, but they cost the region in a variety of ways and far beyond their numbers, not least because of the lost opportunity for the training of replacement cohorts: tertiary educational institutions lack experienced leaders to train those required

for a variety of development activities and to undertake research for development. The large exodus of doctors has impacted negatively on the training of new doctors and on the quality of health services delivery in Nigeria (from where about 600 medical specialists work in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and up to 12 000 in the USA), in Ghana (where 60 per cent of doctors trained in the 1980s have emigrated), South Africa (where many white doctors have emigrated to Canada, Australia, the USA and UK) and Zimbabwe (where about 60 per cent of doctors have moved to Botswana and South Africa as their country's economy collapsed) (Adepoju, 2005). The driving force is the wide differential in incomes and working conditions.

The overall magnitude and impact of the brain drain from sub-Saharan Africa is captured in a report by the United Nations which estimates that "over the next decade Africa will need to train an additional 1 million health care professionals. The leaders must find ways to retain more of the doctors, nurses, pharmacists and laboratory technicians (which) they currently produce" (United Nations, 2005:18). Blaming the rich countries for contributing to the crisis by creating a fatal 'flow' of health professions from the region, the report points out that there are more Malawian doctors practising in Manchester, UK, than in Malawi itself, while 550 of the 600 Zambian doctors trained in medical school from 1978 to 1999 have emigrated abroad (*ibid.*). The IOM reports, similarly, that more Ethiopian doctors are practicing in Chicago (USA) than in Ethiopia. More than half of nurses and doctors have emigrated

from Malawi, and another quarter of the remaining health workers are probably infected with HIV/AIDS. If statistics are to be trusted, Ghana has lost 50 per cent of its doctors to Canada, Britain and the USA. Three-quarters of Zimbabwe's doctors left the country since the early 1990s and half of social health workers have relocated abroad since 2001. In the last eight years more than 16 000 nurses and about 12 500 doctors from the region are currently registered to work in Britain (UKNMC, 2005).

Millennium development goals and other development agendas in the region are being compromised by the emigration of its scarce skilled manpower. A major challenge now facing the region is how to retain, attract back and effectively utilise the rare skills of nationals living mainly in the OECD countries for national development. Sub-Saharan African transnational communities rarely sever ties with home and this is manifested in their investment portfolios; some are active in political advocacy, charity and cultural exchange. The series of initiatives to identify and attract back skilled professionals—engineers, medical doctors, professors, scientists, information technologists and other highly skilled professionals—and utilise their expertise for national development should be encouraged and supported by development partners and rich countries. Political leaders courting nationals to return home must also address the push factors that spurred the brain drain. Remittances do not compensate for the potential contribution of the skilled emigrants through training and transfer of expertise to younger cohorts at

home.

Migration, especially of skilled professionals to engineer development, is a global issue, and is of concern to both poor and rich countries, albeit from opposite perspectives. Rich countries have been prompted to rethink and consolidate policies on who should be attracted and admitted to satisfy their skilled labour shortage. For poor countries – especially in Africa and Asia – the loss of specialists in IT, engineering and medicine, while a miniscule proportion of the workforce, has impacted far beyond the numbers involved. This migration process denies these poorer regions the optimum utilisation of the skills of their diaspora. Many African countries today are churning out students without the requisite rigour of learning from older experts in their fields, or doing research for development and training, thereby stalling development activities and accelerating the collapse of institutions.

### Brain circulation

In SSA, we are now witnessing the transformation of brain drain to brain circulation within the region, especially from parts of Africa to Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, Botswana, and South Africa. As political and economic crises continue to adversely affect conditions in the traditional countries of immigration within the region, highly skilled professionals, pressured to leave their countries by the uncertain economic conditions, have found a new RSA, and the booming economy of Botswana, attractive alternatives to Europe, North America and the Gulf States transforming, the erstwhile brain drain from, into brain circulation within, the region. Migration to RSA increased further since the

demise of the apartheid regime and the spectacular political transformation in the country. The migrants were mostly skilled professionals - professors, doctors, lawyers, nurses and engineers - unlike the traditional immigrants from Lesotho, Swaziland, Botswana, Malawi and Mozambique, whose nationals were mostly unskilled mine workers and farm labourers. Most migrants in Botswana are highly skilled professionals in industry, university and private sector (Adepoju, 2003). There are about 300,000 unfilled posts in South Africa requiring skills which nationals do not possess, in a situation of about 40 percent unemployment rate even as white doctors, engineers, nurses and other professionals are emigrating to Australia, Canada and UK, attracted by higher incomes, scared of the rising domestic crime, and oblivious of the progressive policies of the post-apartheid era.

## **The diaspora**

Migrant-diaspora-return continuum and linkages are both strong and pervasive in Africa. During their sojourn abroad migrants maintain contact by visiting and sending money home. African emigrants usually nurse the hope to return home at the nearest opportunity. Many sending countries (Ghana, Cape Verde, Nigeria, Burkina Faso) have expatriate populations spread over all parts of the world, as a result of emigration over generations. The number of African diaspora is clouded by the history of the slave trade, but an estimated 30 million Africans are working outside their countries of origin (Ratha, 2011). More recent emigrants, wherever they are, rarely sever their

ties with home (Adepoju, *et al.* 2006c). Given favourable working conditions at home, skilled professionals in the diaspora would prefer to return there to contribute to the development of their countries. At the political level, the Africa Union has officially recognised the Diaspora as Africa's sixth region (others being western, central, northern, southern and eastern Africa).

Building networks of scientists with their colleagues at home enables the Diaspora professionals to contribute to the development of home countries without residential relocation, should be encouraged but the stiff immigration policies of rich countries preclude many scientists the flexibility to relocate. But the challenges are daunting: many poor African countries lack the requisite infrastructure, even as poverty, corruption and mismanagement artificially increase the cost of setting up and maintaining needed infrastructures. African diaspora are active in political advocacy, charity and cultural exchange. For example, Ghanaian Diaspora in the UK have pressed and received concession from their government to participate in national elections and are also actively involved in modernising political process. African diasporic associations also help new arrivals adapt and insert into labour markets, reinforce cultural identity, and mobilise members' capital for community development projects at 'home' and contribute to charity and development programmes (Adepoju, 2007b). Nigerians in Diaspora Organisations (NIDO) have been established and are actively involved in dialogue with governments at home.

Networking amongst professionals



in the diaspora and their counterparts at home should be encouraged – in training, technology transfer, information exchange and research projects, principally via the Internet. The possibility for IT specialists in Africa to work for international corporations without physical dislocation should again be encouraged.

African leaders are now exploring strategies to attract back their nationals to contribute to national development. Leaders of Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, among others, have held series of meetings with their nationals in Diaspora, encouraging them to return with offers of incentives to do so. About a dozen governments have established ministries or agencies of the Diaspora to coordinate diaspora-related programmes. Many migrants who also nurse the hope to return home ultimately may have acquired skills and capital that can be productively invested back home but we should also recognise that the skills acquired by some may not match available job opportunities at home. We need more evidence-based research on lessons learnt from, for instance, IOM's Return and Reintegration of Qualified Nationals and similar programmes in Africa to facilitate return, retention and reintegration of nationals and to promote their potential for country-of-origin development (see IOM, 2001).

#### Remittances and other diaspora resources

Diaspora resources include economic remittance, other contributions such as social capital (sources of ideas, behaviours, identities and social capital), technological capital (transfer of knowledge and skills) and political remittance

(political support, identities and practices). In general, migration is a factor of economic development that can have both positive and negative consequences. Advantages of migration include migrants' remittances, lower unemployment, less population pressure and knowledge brought by returning migrants. Immigrants in general embody energy, determination and enterprise and can dynamise economies, social organisation and interchange of experience. The major challenge is how to make migration work productively for, and to channel movements into, regular situations to benefit the three key actors - migrants, origin and destination countries, societies and families.

In addition to direct financial contributions, migration leads to formation of transnational communities that boosts economic development. Migrant communities abroad, as well as returning migrants, become conduits for new ideas and investment. Migrants themselves form associations and networks abroad. Returning migrants bring back skills and work experiences from abroad. Emigrants can also transfer knowledge, technology and investments to countries of origin.

Remittances have been rising steeply and now parallel export earnings, official ODA, and in the case of Lesotho, accounts for one-half of the GNP. Remittances are an important source of income for developing countries. Nationals of Egypt, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Cape Verde, Lesotho, Eritrea, and so on working abroad remit huge sums of money to their home countries.

The sheer volume of remittances -

over \$40 billion a year - has kindled optimism about their positive contribution, and the role of the diaspora, to development in home countries. Remittances are expected to be additional sources of development financing in Africa by providing a lifeline, not only to communities and families to enable them to gain access to basic services such as housing, education and health, but also to national savings and investment via money and capital markets. However, the real impact of remittances on the economies of emigration countries in Africa is yet to be fully understood as, apart from their raising the level of national savings, remittances are essentially private transfers that do not directly augment the public budget. Governments also have no control over them and do not determine their destination or their use. Nor are market forces able to channel remittances to the most productive sectors or into the most innovative entrepreneurial hands to promote development (Ratha, 2007).

The use of remittances varies widely – as lifeline to poor relations left behind to pay for basic services, health care in particular; education of siblings and children; to set up enterprises; and to enhance agricultural production through improved irrigation schemes and other agricultural inputs, as in Mali and Senegal. In Lesotho, remittances constitute the lifeline to the survival of impoverished rural households. Since migration in Africa is generally a household portfolio diversification strategy, pooling resources helps the poor overcome the poverty constraint to migration (Boswell and Crisp, 2004). Remittances sent to families at home

could tremendously benefit recipients to supplement living conditions, investment in education of children and siblings, health care, improved housing and to set up enterprises with a multiple effect on local economies. Hometown associations' investments can improve basic infrastructural facilities that benefit all households, with local, often wider multiplier effect.

In poor communities that lack basic services normally provided by government, the pressing needs are for better housing, funds to pay school fees and buy textbooks and uniforms, access to basic health services – which migrants' remittances supplement or pay for. Many migrants harbour the ambition to return home ultimately and invest in petty trading, refurbished or new buildings, real estates which are high yielding, and savings as fallback on return.

Another pertinent issue is that of the reliability of remittances. Many families in Africa who depend on remittances from relatives in the United States and Europe for day-to-day support are being affected by the global economic meltdown and the crisis-induced retrenchment and unemployment in countries of immigration. This takes a heavy toll on the daily budget of recipients via reduced levels of remittances.

Not all remittances are routed via official channels, in view of heavy transaction costs and risks. Transaction costs of money transfers are exorbitant, and may be risky through informal channels. Irregular migrants normally opt for informal channel of remittances for fear of apprehension and deportation (Doorn, 2002). Senegalese emigrants have adapted the indigenous, trust-

based traditional human courier system (Kara International Exchange) and network of traders, visiting relations and associates to send money home. This process is prompt, avoids exchange rate fluctuations and costly transfer charges, and overcomes the bottleneck of poor accessibility to remote rural areas.

African governments are increasingly interested in promoting migrants' remittances for investment purposes, and are using their embassies to disseminate information on available investment opportunities to their nationals abroad, offering favourable (tax and related) incentive-based policy environment in the country as in Ghana. Kenya's government has expressed its readiness to explore matching funds or provide security for bank loans for its nationals in the Diaspora willing to invest at home. The possibility of Diaspora bonds has also been flagged. All stakeholders should work in concert in exploring the opportunities and minimising the obstacles for remittances, and in particular in lobbying for low-cost transfer services and less stringent regulations in order to increase its productive use.

### Trade and migration

The limited size of internal markets, and especially the disadvantageous position of sub-Saharan African countries in the new era of globalisation, impact on migration dynamics in various ways. Agricultural subsidies in OECD countries, especially the USA and Europe, have a negative effect on the income of farmers in the region. The subsidies on cotton in the USA which artificially spur the level of local production and depressed world prices, impoverishes

millions of Africans. The US spends more subsidising 25,000 cotton farmers (\$4 billion) than it does on its entire aid budget for Africa. The immediate impact was a loss of \$301m by African exporters, with Burkina Faso, Mali and Benin each losing about 2 percent of GDP growth. West and central Africa produced 17 per cent of world cotton exports in 2002 (up from 4 per cent in 1980), but heavy subsidies to the small number of cotton growers in the USA have drastically affected the livelihood of 10 million cotton growers and their families in Benin, Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad, Togo, Kenya and Ghana (OECD, 2004a). Most of these people are now migrating to the cities, in a desperate bid for survival. Also the World Bank estimated that high tariffs and technical barriers to trade cost the region about \$US 20 billion yearly in lost exports—much-needed revenue which could have been used for development and employment-generation (IOM, 2004a). The clamour by African leaders to achieve mutually beneficial trade relations is understandable: deepening poverty have frustrated recent achievements in democratic and economic reform and efforts to improve living conditions of their people, stimulate economic growth and generate employment opportunities.

### Cooperation and dialogue for policy coherence.

Policy dialogue on migration is at a crossroads, not least because of the diversity of actors and stakeholders in poor and rich countries, and a variety of often conflicting interest groups. The migration of skilled and unskilled persons is therefore of increasing concern to both rich and poor countries, but

from different perspectives. In both blocks – in poor and in rich countries – economic and demographic factors underline current debate and policy and there is little or no convergence on issues dealing with migration. In spite of the global financial and economic crisis that is reshaping the architecture of international migration, countries need migrants as contributors to development. Migration could and should be a win-win-win game – though admittedly, some lose; some gain. What is needed is a comprehensive perspective and policy coherence for the orderly and humane management of migration so that globalisation wears a human face (Stiglitz, 2006).

Migration matters should no longer be handled bilaterally; a regional, or even global, approach that harmonises migration policies is required. There is also a need for dialogue and consultation among the various stakeholders, to discuss common approaches to their migration concerns and interests, to share ideas and to enhance understanding and cooperation in migration management. Such a process could lead to the development of a coherent national, intra-regional, inter-regional and international policy framework for the management of migration. Indeed, migration and development policies might have a better chance of succeeding if both sides of the migratory space—circumstances in the country of origin and of that of destination—were taken into account (Van Dalen and Esveldt 2003). Indeed a critical ingredient in the formulation of a coherent migration-friendly policy is an understanding of the dynamics and underlying factors of migration *both* at the origin

and at the destination.

Discourses on migration, especially from the receiving end, are full of anxiety, misconceptions, myths and prejudices; and are also fed on xenophobia. In that context, the positive aspects of migrants as agents of development in source and destination countries should be made explicit. Dialogue and consultations among the various stakeholders, to discuss common approaches to their migration concerns and interests, share ideas and enhance understanding and cooperation in migration management, could lead to the development of a coherent policy framework for the management of migration.

In order to provide planners, politicians and policy makers with comprehensive data on migration dynamics, cross-country collaborative research—using innovative approaches to capture emerging and changing configurations—is required on a number of themes. Foremost among these, we need information on the interlinked factors that drive traditional and changing migratory flows—labour migration, brain drain/brain circulation—in various contexts in the region. Of special policy concern is the independent migration of female professionals and its impact on gender roles, as well as on family, social and development policies. Since migration in sub-Saharan Africa is essentially intraregional, policy research must also address the causes of the region's contagious conflicts. Peace and stability are prerequisites for investment, development and employment generation, and good governance can help curtail skills flight and the exiling of the intelligentsia.

The lesson to be learnt from the

collapse of the WTO Doha trade negotiations in 2006 is that political will must be mustered to open the markets of rich countries to exports from developing countries, and to remove tariffs on imports of labour-intensive, job-creating goods produced by poor countries, in order to enhance economic growth and generate employment. Unless economic and other opportunities are created in poor countries, pressures for international migration will intensify, further stalling domestic development.

The outsourcing of the responsibility for policing of borders, and of halting irregular migrants from the EU to the Maghreb countries is both unrealistic and unsustainable for lack of the financial and logistical facilities essential in carrying out the defence of their borders against the surge of irregular immigrants from other parts of Africa, and beyond. The recognition that strict control does not produce the desired results – instead it inadvertently spurs trafficking – the EU countries have proposed investing in job creation, economic growth and poverty alleviation schemes in Africa, in order to stem the tide of irregular emigration. This strategy also includes some form of guest worker scheme and circulatory migration that allows Africans to work in specified sectors of labour shortage in EU countries, in regular situations. Mali is serving as a pilot for the new strategy.

African countries need to ensure that their specific interests and concerns are adequately reflected in any bilateral and multilateral migration negotiations. Issues relating to the treatment of their nationals living and working in regular situations in EU countries, the rights of irregular

migrants to basic services, and the need to review the unfair trade regimes which impoverish millions of their nationals who are engaged in farming at home should assume centre stage in future migration agreements. Efforts should be made to revisit existing agreements in order to review and amend unfavourable conditions. Bilateral and multilateral agreements between countries sending and receiving migrants must also address the issue of depleting sub-Saharan Africa of its scarce skilled-manpower resources. It is important that residential laws of rich countries be made flexible, to give skilled professionals the opportunity of relocating without losing their residence rights in those countries (Adepoju *et al.*, 2007).

### **The future of migration dynamics: A shared responsibility**

African countries are facing daunting challenges in respect of most migratory configurations. Poverty eradication strategies should therefore be at the forefront of development assistance, aligned with domestic mechanisms for stable macro-economic environments favourable to growth, to generate employment opportunities and foster enterprise and self-sustaining livelihoods. Efforts by poor African countries to restructure their economies and open their markets to share in the global economy have been disappointing. Thus far, emphasis on economic and political aspects and policies has ignored the crucial demographic dimension – that rapid population growth intensifies poverty and emigration pressure.

Rich countries have a moral respon-



sibility to assist programmes for the orderly return and reintegration of migrants to their countries of origin, especially highly-skilled professionals whose expertise is being productively utilised in these rich countries. Any long-term solution should emphasise economic growth and employment generation, the promotion of human rights, and security and related policy measures – as well as the factors that generate emigration from poor countries in the first place.

In a spirit of co-responsibility, rich countries have to help poor African countries foster local development, reduce poverty and create domestic employment. Compensation for the brain drain could take the form of supporting projects which involve professionals going back to their countries of origin for short periods, to work in special programmes and education (ILO, 2004). Ethical recruitment of highly-skilled professionals must be enforced, and bilateral agreements promoted to minimise the adverse consequences on the development of source countries. Such bilateral and multilateral agreements between developed and SSA countries should also address issues of haemorrhaging of its scarce skilled manpower resources. It is important that residential rules in rich countries be made flexible to enable skilled professionals the opportunity for virtual relocation without losing their residence rights.

It seems apparent that success of restrictive migration policies depends on improving the economic situation in the immigrants' countries of origin. Such a strategy also has the potential to stimulate the return of skilled nationals –

needed for development in their own countries. This calls for cooperation between the poor sub-Saharan African labour-exporting countries and those of the North, beyond the rhetoric of co-development. Unless economic and other opportunities are created in these countries, pressures for international migration will intensify. And in spite of the sharp economic and demographic divide between rich and poor countries, international migration can, with determination, political will, the right policies and recognition of the potential positive contribution of migration to development, indeed be a win-win-win situation to countries and societies that send and receive migrants and indeed the migrants themselves.

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